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Heinz, John

What others say:

No pre-Watergate CIA in mind

I recently had occasion to review your Nov. 24 editorial regarding my statement on the CIA. You are quite right, of course, that there is a certain irony in the prospect that Iran, the location of one of our intelligence failures, should now become the rationale for reviving the CIA. On the surface we've come full circle.

A deeper look, however, suggests the relationship is not so clear. Iran may have been an intelligence failure, but that certainly was not the cause of the restraints imposed on the CIA during the Watergate period, which were designed to curb abuses of power both here and abroad. Though one might find CIA failures in Iran during and before Watergate, it is equally clear that a severely constrained intelligence capability afterwards was partly responsible for our failure to correctly understand the situation in 1976-1978.

In any event, the fact that Iran does not constitute a great intelligence or diplomatic success for our country certainly should not suggest that we have no need for an intelligence capability or future successes. If anything, it makes the need even more clear.

I would also note that no one in Washington is talking about a restoration of the pre-Watergate CIA or of undoing the reforms of that period. What we are talking about is restoring our ability to adequately gather timely and accurate intelligence and keep it secret. For an elaboration on what is needed, I refer you to the enclosed article by Ray Cline which appeared in the Dec. 20 "New York Times."

Iran has made clear that we cannot act unless we know, and that we cannot learn solely through the media or other public channels. Whether we use intelligence to prop up a dictator, push him out, or simply observe him is a policy issue we can and must debate. The need to have information before that decision, it seems to me, is incontestable.

John Heinz
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

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